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ON THE ALTERNATION BETWEEN INFLECTIONAL CASE AND PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES IN ROMANIAN

ALEXANDRU MARDALE

ABSTRACT

The goal of this paper is to examine the alternation between nominal expressions marked with morphological case (e.g., fiul regelui “the king’s son”) and certain prepositional phrases (e.g., fiul de rege “the royal son”) in Romanian. We will show that the two types of constructions are alike insofar as they involve a relation which may either pertain to the lexical meaning of the head N or else be contextually triggered by the presence of the second argument. We will also observe that they differ regarding the nature of the second argument: a strong correlation can be shown to exist between syntactic categories (DPs vs. NPs), Case marking (morphological vs. prepositional) and semantic type (individuals vs. properties).

KEYWORDS

(inflectional/morphological) case, preposition(s), entity, property

1 Introduction

1.1 What is case?

Traditionally, case is a morphological notion that refers to an inflectional morpheme occurring on N(oun)s or on other constituents of the N(oun) P(hrase) / D(eterminer) P(hrase) (e.g., D, A(djectives), Quant(fiers), Num(erals)).

For instance, in English and French, the inflectional morpheme varies with the position of the (pro)noun in the sentence. As shown in the following examples, the pronoun is Nominative when preverbal (i.e. Subject) and it is Accusative when postverbal or postNominative (i.e. Direct Object):

(1) a. John loves Mary. (English)
   b. He isloves her.
   c. *Her loves he.

(2) a. Jean regarde Marie. (French)
   b. Il la regarde.
   c. *La regarde il.

On the contrary, in languages like Russian, the inflectional morpheme attaches to all NPs / DPs (and their constituents) in the sentence (apud Matushansky (2007)):

(3) Eta talantlivaja studentka znaet dvux lingvistov. (Russian)
    this student knows two linguists.

more specific notion that refers to a theory dealing with the assignation of the so-called *abstract case*.

*Abstract case* is a (syntactic) property of nominal expressions that reflects their relation with a Specifier or with some Head. Abstract case may (or may not) have a morphological (i.e. inflectional) realization.

In other words, *morphological case* is an overt realisation of abstract case. The following examples from Latin illustrate this possibility:

(4) a. \textbf{Pater filium} amat. \\
father\textsubscript{Nom} son\textsubscript{Acc} loves \\
The father loves his son.

b. \textbf{Patrem filius} amat. \\
father\textsubscript{Acc} son\textsubscript{Nom} loves \\
The son loves his father.

1.2 A few remarks about case in Romanian

Romanian is a Romance language which partially inherits morphological cases from Latin, namely the Dative case and the Genitive case which are homonymous.

Dative is assigned in verbal constructions (5), while Genitive is assigned in nominal constructions (6):

(5) \begin{array}{ll}
\text{am} & \text{dat} \\
\text{have give} & \text{pastpart} \\
\text{books king-the}\textsubscript{Dat} \\
I gave (some books) to the king.
\end{array}

(6) \begin{array}{ll}
\text{cărțile} & \text{regelui} \\
\text{books-the} & \text{king-the}\textsubscript{Gen} \\
\text{The king’s books.}
\end{array}

The difference between Dative and Genitive is visible when substituting by a (personal / possessive) pronoun as in the examples below:

(7) \begin{array}{ll}
\text{i-am} & \text{dat} \\
\text{himCL} & \text{have give} \\
\text{pastpart} & \text{books} \\
\text{he}\textsubscript{Dat} & \text{he}\textsubscript{Gen} \\
I gave him (some books).
\end{array}

(8) \begin{array}{ll}
\text{cărțile} & \text{lu} / \text{*sale} \\
\text{books-the} & \text{he}\textsubscript{Gen} / \text{he}\textsubscript{Gen} \\
\text{His books.}
\end{array}

Nominative and Accusative are also homonymous, but – unlike Dative and / or Genitive – they do not have a morphologically marked form (see (9) – (10) below), with the exception of certain forms of the personal pronouns in Accusative. The latter situation is illustrated in (11):

(9) \begin{array}{ll}
\text{Studentul} & \text{vizitează profesorul.} \\
\text{Student-the}\textsubscript{Nom} & \text{visits professor-the}\textsubscript{Acc} \\
The student is visiting the teacher.
\end{array}

(10) \begin{array}{ll}
\text{Profesorul} & \text{vizitează studentul.} \\
\text{professor-the}\textsubscript{Nom} & \text{visits student-the}\textsubscript{Acc} \\
The teacher is visiting the student.
In what follows, this paper focuses exclusively on the analysis of Dative and Genitive.

1.3 The puzzle

Among its morphological case paradigm, Romanian displays a remarkable alternation between nominal expressions marked for Dative or Genitive and P(prepositional) P(hrase)s headed by one of the functional prepositions *a, de or la*.

This phenomenon appears systematically in the case of Genitive which alternates with PPs headed by the preposition *de*. This can be seen in the following examples:

(12) a. aceasta este camera oaspeților de la nunta Mariei (Genitive)
This is the room of the guests of at marriage the Mary Gen
This is the room of the guests from Mary’s marriage.
b. aceasta este camera de oaspeți la care am visat întotdeauna
This is the guests’ room which I always dreamed of.

The above-mentioned alternation is nevertheless much more restricted in the case of Genitive which alternates with PPs headed by the preposition *a* (see the constructions in (13) below), or in the case of Dative which alternates with PPs headed by the preposition *la* (see the constructions in (14)):

(13) a. deportarea evreilor / *a evrei (Genitive)
deportation-the Jews-the Gen A Jews
The deportation of the Jews.
b. deportarea a zece evrei / *zeclor evrei
deportation-the A ten Jews ten-the Gen Jews
The deportation of ten Jews.

(14) a. s-a adresat participanților / ??la participanți (Dative)
(S)he addressed to the participants.
b. s-a adresat la cinci participanți / *cincilor participanți
(S)he has addressed to five participants

The goal of the next paragraphs is to discuss the conditions under which these alternances occur in Romanian, on the one hand, and to propose an analysis for each of these constructions, on the other hand.
2 Case-marking and prepositional-marking of DPs

2.1 DPs marked for Genitive and PPs headed by a

As shown in (13) above, adnominal constituents marked with morphological Genitive may alternate with PPs headed by the functional preposition a. Note that this alternation is not free, but it is constrained by the form of the first constituent in the DP as follows:

(i) if the first constituent of the DP is invariable (i.e., cannot take the inflectional morphemes), a-marking is obligatory. The next paradigm illustrates some cases of invariables constituents that trigger obligatorily prepositional marking: numerals (15a), the universal quantifier tot ‘whole’ (15b), the pronoun ceea ce ‘what’ (15c):

(15) a. familile a doi elevi families-the A two pupils
The families of two pupils.
b. adunarea a tot satul assembly-the A whole village-the
The assembly of the whole village.
c. consecința a ceea ce s-a spus mai devreme consequence-the A what se_Refl*has say_PastPart more early
The consequence of what has been said earlier.

NB! It is important to point out that the case of the constituent preceded by a is a default case which is generally associated to Accusative:

(15’) a. adunarea a tot satul assembly-the A whole_{Acc} village-the
The assembly of the whole village.
b. *adunarea a totului satul assembly-the A whole-the_{Gen} village-the

(ii) if the first constituent of the DP is variable (i.e., can take the inflectional morpheme), case-marking is obligatory as shown in (16) below:

(16) a. familia fiecăruī elev family-the every_{Gen} pupil
The family of every pupil.
b. lectura unei cărți reading-the a_{Gen} books_{Gen}
The reading of a book.

However, there is a small number of constituents that may allow both case-marking (see the examples in (17) below) and a-marking (see the examples in (18) below):

(17) a. familiile câtorva elevi families-the the some_{Gen} pupils
The families of some pupils.
b. adăugarea unui pic de zahăr addition-the a_{Gen} little of sugar
The addition of a little quantity of sugar.

(18) a. familiile a câțiva elevi families-the A some pupils
The families of some pupils.

b. adăugarea  a un pic de zahăr (apud Giurgea (work in progress))
addition-the A a little of sugar
The addition of a little quantity of sugar.

2.2 DPs marked for Dative and PPs headed by la

As it has been shown in (14) above, nominal constituents marked with Dative may alternate with PPs headed by the functional preposition la.

This alternation observes the same constrains as the ones examined in the previous section:

(i) if the first constituent of the DP is invariable, prepositional marking with la is obligatory (19):

(19) a. am dat (diplome) la doi elevi
have givePastPart diplomas LA two pupils
I have given diplomas to two pupils.
b. m-am adresat la tot satul
meRef-t-have addressPastPart LA whole village-the
I spoke to the whole village.
c. s-a opus la ceea ce s-a spus mai devreme
seRef-t-has opposePastPart LA what seRef-t-has sayPastPart more early
(S)he opposed to what has been said earlier.

(ii) if the first constituent of the DP is variable, case-marking is obligatory (20):

(20) a. am dat (diplome) unui elev
have givePastPart diplomas aDat pupil
I gave diplomas to a pupil.
b. m-am adresat întregului sat
meRef-t-have addressed entire-theDat village
I spoke to the whole village.
c. s-a opus tuturor lucrurilor spuse mai devreme
seRef-t-has opposePastPart allDat things-theDat saidFemPl more early
(S)he opposed to all the things said earlier.

Notice that a limited number of constituents may allow both case-marking (see the examples in (21) below) and la-marking (see the examples in (22) below):

(21) a. a telefonat câtorva colegi
has phonePastPart someDat colleagues
(S)he called some colleagues.
b. a acordat premii fiecărui elev
has awardPastPart prices everyDat pupil
(S)he gave prices to every pupil.

(22) a. a telefonat la câtiva colegi
has phonePastPart LA some colleagues
(S)he called some colleagues.
b. ??a acordat premii la fiecare elev
has awardPastPart LA every pupil
(S)he gave prizes to every pupil.

2.3 Towards a generalisation

In the light of the data examined above, we can now tempt to propose the following generalisation with respect to case-marking of DPs (i.e. nouns having a D) in Romanian:

(23) a. DPs having a variable constituent on the first position are morphologically case-marked;
   b. DPs having an invariable constituent on the first position are prepositionally case marked.

3 Case-marking and prepositional-marking of NPs

3.1 The data

As illustrated in the examples (12) above, adnominal constituents marked with Genitive systematically alternate with PPs headed by the functional preposition de.

This phenomenon appears with several types of nouns: relational nouns (24a), deverbal nouns (24b), picture nouns (24c), object denoting nouns (24d):

(24) a. fiul regelui vs. fiul de rege
   son-the king-theGen son-the DE king
   The son of the king.
   The royal son.
   b. construirea caselor vs. construirea de case
   building-the houses-theGen building-the DE houses
   The building of the houses.
   The houses building.
   c. fotografia grupului vs. fotografia de grup
   picture-the group-theGen picture-the DE group
   The picture of the group.
   The group’s picture.
   d. ușa bisericii vs. ușa de biserică
   door-the church-theGen door-the DE church
   The door of the church.
   The church’s door.

Both types of construction express similar (lexical) semantic values: alienable possession (25a), inalienable possession (25b), human relationship (25c), goal (25d), content (25e), location (25f), time (25g):

(25) a. curtea împăratului / curtea de împărat
    court-the emperor-theGen court-the DE emperor
    The court of the emperor.
   b. gulerul cămășii / gulerul de cămășă
    collar-the shirts-theGen collar-the DE shirt
    The collar of the shirt.
   c. nepotul unchiului / nepotul de unchi
    nephew-the uncle-theGen nephew-the DE uncle
    The nephew of the uncle.
   d. camera oaspeților / camera de oaspeți
    room-the guests-theGen room-the DE guests
The guests’ room.

e. 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ostrovul florilor</th>
<th>/</th>
<th>ostrovul de flori</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>isle-the flowers-the\text{Gen}</td>
<td>isle-the DE flowers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The isle of the flowers.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

f. 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>aerul muntelui</th>
<th>/</th>
<th>aerul de munte</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>air-the mountain-the\text{Gen}</td>
<td>air-the DE mountain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The mountain air.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

g. 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>căldura verii</th>
<th>/</th>
<th>căldura de vară</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>heat-the summers-the\text{Gen}</td>
<td>heat-the DE summer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The summer heat.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2 Formal constraints

It is important to point out that the two types of adnominal constituents mentioned above obey to different formal constraints than the ones examined in §2:

   (i) adnominal constituents marked with Genitive are necessarily nouns with a determiner:

   (26) 
   a. fiul regelui / fiul unui rege
   son-the king-the\text{Gen} son-the a\text{Gen} king
   The king’s son. The son of a king.
   b. *fiul rege
   son-the king

   (ii) in contrast, adnominal constituents marked with \textit{de} are necessarily nouns without determiner, regardless of its nature (27a), but can have (adjectival or prepositional) modifiers (27b-c):

   (27) 
   a. *fiul de regele / *fiul de un rege
   son-the DE king-the son-the DE a king
   The son of the king.
   b. fiul de rege african
   son-the DE king African
   The African royal son.
   c. construirea de case din lemn
   building-the DE houses of wood
   The wooden houses building.

In other words, adnominal constituents marked with Genitive are full nominal expressions (i.e., DPs), while adnominal \textit{de}-marked constituents are incomplete nominal expressions (i.e., NPs).

3.3 Idiomatic expressions

There are exceptions to the free substitution between the constructions with morphological Genitive and the constructions with the preposition \textit{de}, namely compounds.

On the one hand, there are constructions taking only the Genitive-marking and disallowing \textit{de}-marking. The following paradigm illustrates this possibility:

(28) 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>floarea soarelui</th>
<th>vs.</th>
<th>*floarea de soare</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>flower-the sun-the\text{Gen}</td>
<td>flower-the DE sun</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sunflower.

b. regina noptii vs. *regina de noapte
    queen-the nights-theGen
    A night flower smelling good.

c. iarba dracului vs. *iarba de drac
    grass-the devil-theGen
    Weeds.

d. măna Maicii Domnului vs. *măna de Maica Domnului
    hand-the Mother-theGen God-theGen
    Some king of flower smelling good.

On the other hand, there are constructions – such as the ones illustrated in (29) below – taking only the de-marking and disallowing Genitive-marking:

(29) a. floarea de colț vs. *floarea colțului
    flower-the DE corner
    Edelweiss.

b. laptele de pasăre vs. *laptele păsării
    milk-the DE bird
    A cake made with eggs and milk.

c. dintele de lapte vs. *dintele laptelui
    tooth-the DE milk
    Milk tooth.

As in the case of the systematic alternations (see the previous sections), the choice between case-marking and de-marking for compounds is strictly correlated to the categorial status of the adnominal constituent. More precisely, DPs are case-marked, while NPs are de-marked.

However, since we are dealing with idiomatic constructions, we may be tempted to think that the choice of one or another type of marking depends on extralinguistic factors.

Indeed, nominal expressions referring to kinds or to unique entities (such as the sun, the devil, the Virgin Mary) are generally realized as DPs (i.e., nouns with the definite article), hence case-marking occurs.

In contrast, nominal expressions referring to non unique entities (such as birds, corners, milk) may be realized as NPs, hence de-marking occurs.

3.4 Towards a generalisation

The data examined in this section allow us to propose the following revisited generalisation:

(30) a. An adnominal nominal projection is (morphologically) case-marked if it is a DP with a variable constituent on the first position (cf. (23a) above);

b. An adnominal nominal projection is (prepositionally) marked by de if it is an NP.

3.5 Syntactic structure and interpretation

The contrast described above between case-marking of DPs and prepositional marking of NPs may be represented in a twofold manner.

From a syntactic point of view, the following representations may be proposed:
The structure given in (31) differs from the one in (32) with respect to the categorial nature of the embedded constituent: PPs headed by a so-called „functional” preposition in (31) and DPs carrying the inflectional morpheme in (32).

They also differ from a semantic point of view: while in the constructions with Genitive the head N denotes a relation between two individuals (the one denoted by DP₁ and the one denoted by DP₂) (see Beyssade & Dobrovie-Sorin (2005)), in prepositionally marked constructions, the head N denotes a relation between an individual (denoted by DP₁) and a property (denoted by NP₂) (see Kolliakou (1999), Mardale (2007)).

NB! In old Romanian, as well as in some contemporary regional dialects, there are constructions in which adnominal de-constituents may have an <e>-type denotation. Note however that in that case, de introduces a DP headed by the indefinite article (not a NP):

\[(A)\]

a. c-ar fi pierdut urma d-o câprioară (apud TDR: 258)
that-AUXPAST.COND be lost track-the DE-aFEM.SG deer
… that (s)he would lost the track of a deer
b. o coudă de un topor (apud TDR: 372)
aFEM.SG handle DE anMASC.SG axe
a handle of an axe

3.6 Distributional constraints

The correlations established in the previous sections explain a number of distributional constraints. In what follows, we will examine these constraints.

3.6.1 Distribution in predicate position\(^1\) (cf. Milner (1982))

Adnominal constituents marked with Genitive case cannot appear after the copula:

\[(33)\]

a. *fiul este regelui
son-the is king-theGen
b. *fotografia este grupului
picture-the is group-theGen
c. *uşa este bisericii
door-the is churches-theGen

In order for them to appear after the copula, we need to insert the so-called genitive article al, a, ai, ale (made up of the preposition a followed by the definite article) in front of the Genitive DP:

\(^1\) By predicate position we understand post-copular position.
In contrast, we can observe that *de*-marked constituents can appear after the copula (35):

(35)  
a. fiul este de rege (nu de sclav)  
son-the is DE king (not DE slave)  
This is a royal son (not a slave son).

b. ușa este de biserică (nu de casă)  
door-the is DE church (not DE house)  
This is a church door (not a house door).

### 3.6.2 Alternance with APs

Certain *de*-marked constituents may alternate with an AP (36), while Genitive-marked constituents may not do so:

(36)  
a. fiul de rege → fiul regal  
son-the DE king → son-the royalAdj  
The royal son.

b. ușa de biserică → ușa bisericească  
door-the DE church → door-the churchAdj  
The ecclesiastic door.

### 3.6.3 Alternation with pronouns

Adnominal constituents marked with Genitive case may alternate with personal pronouns (which are equally marked with Genitive case):

(37)  
a. fiul regelui → fiul lui  
son-the king-theGen → son-the himGen  
The king’s son. His son.

b. ușa bisericii → ușa ei  
door-the church-theGen → door-the herGen  
The door of the church. Its door.

In contrast, *de*-marked constituents cannot alternate with personal pronouns.

### 3.6.4 Anaphora

The complement of *de*-marked constituents cannot serve as anaphoric antecedents for another DP (38). In other words, *de*-marked constituents are not referential. For instance, in (38a) the relative care „thay” cannot refer to the adnominal constituent (de) rege „royal” since the latter denoted a quality (i.e. a property) and not an individual. In this sense, compare the construction given in (38a) with the one in (38b):
(38)  a. *El este fiul de [rege], pe care tânăra speră să îl întâlnească.
   he is son-the DE [king], PE_Acc which_i youngwoman-the hopes that him_i meet
   b. El este [fiul de rege], pe care tânăra speră să îl întâlnească.
   he is [son-the DE king], PE_Acc which_i youngwoman-the hopes that him_i meet
   He is the royal son that the youngwoman hopes to meet.

In constrast, the adnominal constituents marked with Genitive may serve as antecedents for anaphoric pronouns since the Genitive marked constituents denote individuals (see (39)). In other words, constituents marked with Genitive are referential:

(39)  a. i. El este fiul regelui pe care tânăra speră să îl întâlnească.  (ambiguous)
   he is son-the king-theGen PE_Acc which_i youngwoman-the hopes to him_i meet
   ii. El este fiul [regelui], pe care tânăra speră să îl întâlnească.
   he is son-the [king-theGen], PE_Acc which_i youngwoman-the hopes to him_i meet
   iii. El este [fiul regelui], pe care tânăra speră să îl întâlnească.
   he is [son-the king-theGen], PE_Acc which_i youngwoman-the hopes that him_i meet
   b. i. Ea este fiica [profesorului], pe care l-am văzut ieri.  (non ambiguous)
   she is daughter-the [teacher-theGen], PE_Acc which_i has see_pastpart yesterday
   ii. Ea este [fiica profesorului], pe care l-am văzut-o ieri.
   she is [daughter-the teacher-theGen], PE_Acc which_i has see_pastpart-her_CL_i yesterday
   She is the daughter of the teacher that I saw yesterday.

3.7  To sum up

The following table summarizes the results of this section.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Genitive-marked constituents</th>
<th>adnominal <em>de</em>-marked constituents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>have a D(eterminer)</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>denote properties</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>can appear in predicate position</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>can alternate with APs</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>can alternate with pronouns</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>can be antecedents for anaphoric pronouns</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3 Conclusion

The constructions analyzed here are alike insofar as they involve a relation (which may either pertain to the lexical meaning of the head N or else be contextually triggered by the presence of the second argument).

They differ regarding the nature of the second argument: a strong correlation can be shown to exist between syntactic categories (DPs vs. NPs), Case marking (morphological vs. prepositional) and semantic type (type $<$e$>$ vs. type $<$e, t$>$).

5 Selected references
